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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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SUBJECT: ISRAELIS STILL SEEKING A CHANNEL TO THE SENIOR  
TURKISH POLITICAL LEVEL

REF: ANKARA 1645

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons 1.4(b,d)

¶1. (C) Israeli Embassy Spokesperson Amit Zarouk (Protect) told us November 18 his government, urged on by Minister of Defense Barak and the Israel Defense Force, continues to search for a reliable communication channel to the GoT's senior political level. Zarouk fears the lack of such a channel reduces Israel's ability "to contain the next crisis." He harbors no hope Israeli PM Netanyahu and PM Erdogan would re-establish the relationship former PM Olmert nurtured with his Turkish counterpart before Israel's December-January Gaza military operations. Netanyahu, according to Zarouk, shares his embassy's assessment that the Turkish prime minister is the wellspring of GoT hostility towards Israel. The embassy detects significant discomfort on the part of senior MFA career staff and FM Davutoglu with the emotion-laden criticism Erdogan has directed towards Israel, but is unsure the prime minister's distance from his own foreign ministry represents an exploitable opportunity. Nevertheless, the embassy is pleased President Gul, whom the Israelis view as more inclined to civil bilateral discourse, has accepted its request to see Minister of Industry, Trade and Labor Ben-Eliazer when he visits Ankara later this month. Erdogan will be out the country during the visit.

¶2. (C) Assuming reasonably that high-profile good-offices roles remain attractive to the GoT, the Israeli cabinet, according to Zarouk, is weighing an invitation to the Turkish MFA to join, as a junior partner to the French, in the latter's nascent effort to mediate talks between Syria and Israel. The GoI is considering conveying the invitation via the Israeli MFA Director General (Deputy Secretary-equivalent) and his Ministry of Defense counterpart, who may be dispatched soon to meet with Turkish MFA Undersecretary Sinirlioglu and the Turkish Deputy Chief of Staff. The embassy hopes such an invitation would induce better behaviour from Erdogan and restore a Turkish channel to Damascus that Israel genuinely values. Zarouk said that when Israel aircraft bombed the suspected Syrian nuclear

facility in September 2007, Olmert used the GoT to convey a message to Damascus that the attack was a one-time event, which would not be followed up unless Syria mistakenly attempted retaliation.

13. (C) COMMENT: From our perspective (admittedly limited to the Israeli Embassy here), the Israelis regret deeply the recent rapid deterioration in their relationship with Turkey. They seem prepared to absorb Erdogan's vituperation almost indefinitely. We share their worry that, since Erdogan has suffered no repercussions for his hostility towards Israel, he may be tempted to make harsher public statements that could damage the bilateral relationship irreparably.

JEFFREY

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